Archives

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IN THE

CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

BY

HENRY H. TUCKER.

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"Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."—MATTHEW iii. 15.

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."—MATTHEW xxviii. 19.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."—MARK xvi. 16.

MANKIND are prone to two evil intellectual habits: one is to look at only one side of a question, and the other is to carry the partial view thus obtained to an extreme. Nowhere are these unfortunate tendencies more conspicuous than in the domain of religion, and on no subject, perhaps, more than on the subject of baptism. Owing to extreme and one-sided views, its importance is overrated by some, and underrated by others.

The former class attribute to it a power which is supernatural, miraculous, omnipotent. In their view, it has the power of creating the soul anew. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; and baptism brings him into Christ. Baptism is essential to regeneration, or rather it *is* regeneration. Without regeneration there is no salvation, and without baptism there is no regeneration. All who are regenerate are saved, and all who are baptized are regenerate. Baptism is therefore all in all. More is not needed; less is perdition. In the last day, those to whom the Judge will say, "Come, ye blessed," are the baptized; and those to whom he will say, "Depart, ye cursed," are the unbaptized.

Some of the greatest extremists might accept these results; others, less logical, will not accept the results, while yet they hold to the principles that lead to them. Having merely stated this view, without argument either for or against it, it is enough to say that, in the

opinion of those who are called Baptists, it greatly overrates the value of baptism, and is wholly unsupported by Scripture.

Another class regard baptism as a mere form. The most consistent of them regard it as a useless ceremony, and discard it altogether. Others retain the rite, but lay little stress on it. In their opinion, the place it occupies as a human duty is an insignificant one; they speak of it as a non-essential, and therefore as a thing not worthy of any very great consideration. Many persons are lost with it, and many are saved without it, and hence any great time or attention bestowed on this is so much taken away from the weightier matters of the law. Without arguing the question, suffice it to say that, in our opinion, this view underrates the value and importance of baptism, and is not countenanced by the word of God. Strange to say, however, persons who entertain this view are sometimes in haste to administer the ordinance of baptism to a dying person; and

this shows that, after all, they are unsettled in their minds, and also that the transition is easy from one extreme to its opposite.

But what *is* baptism? Certainly it is a form, but it is not a *mere* form. The word *mere* strips the form of all its adjuncts, and leaves nothing *but* the form. Baptism is clearly more than this; for,

1. It is an act of obedience. Now, obedience to God is as high a function as any moral being can perform. It is the carrying out of the purposes of infinite wisdom and goodness. The least act of obedience is a great act. Not one jot nor tittle of the law of God is unworthy of the source whence it came; and he who obeys in the least particular is thus far in harmony with the Almighty; and, in doing the will of the Supreme, he is doing that which ennobles himself and glorifies his Maker. In what way can a man or an angel more grandly exalt himself? In what way can he better serve his God? To say that such an act is a

mere form because it *involves* a form, is to lose sight of the God who has commanded it.

2. It is but a slight variation from the preceding thought to say that, so far as baptism is a form, it is a *prescribed* form, and therefore the peer of anything else that is prescribed. "Whoso shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill," and he also it is who has prescribed the form we have spoken of. There is the same authority for this that there is for any other duty. It is part of the law of God; and to disparage any part of that law is to disparage the whole of it. God's law is a unit; God's law is virtually himself; it *is* himself expressed. To speak lightly of *it* is to speak lightly of *him;* and to say that anything which he has commanded is simply a form, a *mere* form, a naked form, and *nothing but* a form, would seem to be a shocking irreverence. If it is not taking the *name* of God

in vain, it is at least speaking vainly of the *law* of God; and if there be a distinction in these kinds of profanity, it is not needful now to trace it.

3. Baptism is an act of worship. All work is worship; especially all righteousness is worship; and especially is *this* act of righteousness an act of worship, because there is nothing in the nature of things which requires it; in this act we obey no instinct, no dictate of mere reason, nor of unenlightened conscience. It is done in homage to no abstract principle of right, if there be any such principle; it is done as unto God. It is done *purely* for him, and therefore would seem to be worship in a higher sense than almost anything else that we do. If it is glory to the angels to cast their crowns at his feet, so also it is glory to us to cast ourselves at his feet, as we do when, subjecting our wills to his, we obey his word. Worship formulated is none the less worship; and if God himself is the formulator, that fact would

seem to invest the worship with higher dignity and greater acceptableness.

4. Baptism is also an act of imitation. The Son of God set us the example, and in so doing he uttered the word "Thus." True, this word was addressed directly to John, and had reference to the act immediately to be performed. But what was duty for the actors in that scene is duty for all; what was duty then is duty now. The disciples afterwards baptized under the immediate order of our Lord, and hence we know that what he then inaugurated he intended to be continued; and if the act is continued, why may we not couple with it the words which first accompanied it? May we not extend the meaning of the word *thus*, and consider it as addressed not only to John, but to all of us? Otherwise, why was the record made? If any lovers of our Lord had stood on the banks of the Jordan and witnessed the scene, would they not have understood him, in the use of the word *thus*

accompanied by the act, to describe duty for them? *We* stand on the banks. We witness the scene. We witness other baptisms administered by his order, and doubtless in his presence, and hence may consider ourselves addressed in the word *thus*. It is as if Christ had said, "I am your model; here is your pattern; what I am doing, it becomes you to do." If there be any doubt in language, there is none in action. The act, the fact to be witnessed, is the thing to be done. It is always safe to follow the example of Christ, and perilous it is to refuse to do so, when he has declared that he *intended* it to be followed. Not to obey is to disobey; and if obedience to God be our highest glory, disobedience is our greatest disgrace and our greatest destruction. To disobey when we are *told* what to do is a certain grade of crime, but to disobey when we are not only told, but *shown* what to do, would seem to be a higher grade of crime. When he who was the brightness of the Father's

glory and the express image of his person, submitted to the ordinance of baptism, and, virtually summoning the whole world to hear, said "THUS," he dignified the form into something *more* than a form. He made it a part of his history, and thus glorified it for eternity; and at the same time he made it part of our duty, and thus exalted us to the privilege of being so far, at least, in union with him. It is no small thing to say that his history is our history. It is a privilege to know that in any one single thing we have done exactly what he did. That far, at least, we know our record is honorable and glorious. Christ said to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me!" Shall we confine the call to these? His whole life is an embodiment of the same words as addressed to us all. Follow thee! Yes, precious Saviour! we follow thee with joy! Blessed are they who follow! Blessed are they who walk in his footsteps! If we would be conformed to his image, let us conform to his

actions. If God said once to Moses, "See thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount," and if Moses showed his greatest wisdom in exact obedience, and if he would have shown greatest folly in speaking of this as a mere form, so when Christ has said to us, as he does by the word *thus*, "See thou do all things according to the pattern I showed thee in baptism," we shall be wise indeed if we copy the pattern, and foolish indeed if we speak lightly of it. No, it is not a mere form; it is an adaptation of ourselves, thus far, at least, to him.

5. Baptism is an act of consecration. It is the outward expression of an inward act. It is the visible embodiment of a sentiment—the sentiment of consecration. The body is made subservient to the behests of the soul, and gives itself to baptism as the soul gives itself to God. Admit that this inward consecration might exist without the outward act, it is still true that no sentiment takes as thorough pos-

session of us unexpressed as when expressed; and be sure that the form of expression which God has selected will most intensify the sentiment, and better than any other subserve its purpose.

6. But baptism is more than an act of private consecration; it is an act of public profession. It is an announcement to the world that we are Christ's. It is the act by which we commit ourselves openly to him and to his cause. It is the public putting on of Christ; and surely to put on Christ is not a mere form. Putting on Christ is what an angel cannot do. It is what cannot be done in heaven; in no part of the universe except on *earth* can this glorious deed be done.

7. Baptism is an act of symbolic meaning, and while it is a profession of faith, it also teaches by emblem the principles of the faith that is professed. Divine truth is taught in *actions* prescribed by the divine will, no less than in *words* so prescribed. Baptism is an

expression, brief but comprehensive, of the leading doctrines of the New Testament. It is itself a Testament; it is itself the word of God. Pregnant with infinite meaning, it is the most condensed and most intensive utterance, in symbol, of revealed truth that God has vouchsafed to us; or, at least if it has a peer, it is found only in that other ordinance in which we show forth the Lord's death until he comes. To speak lightly of this, to regard it as a form and nothing but a form, is to be blind to almost heavenly glory.

When the King of kings and Lord of lords issues sovereign mandates to his holy angels, can we suppose that they regard any one of them as a mere form? Would those glorified ones so trifle with that which has for its authority, *Thus saith the Lord?* How much better is the case when man, whose breath is in his nostrils, thus impeaches the wisdom of the All-wise, Supreme, and Eternal Lawgiver of the universe? Is it conceivable that the

great God could possibly lend the sanction of his authority to that which is nothing but emptiness? or that he would command us to do that which might well be left undone? Does disobedience of any part of his law make no change in our relations to him? A mere form is an insignificant thing and unworthy of respect. Has God commanded anything that is insignificant or unworthy of respect? Is any part of his law contemptible? The soul takes fright at the very thought. God's commandment is exceeding broad; each part of it is jealous of the honor of every other, and each is invested with the majesty of all.

A blessed thing it is to obey, but when we obey in a manner prescribed, and when we worship, and imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, doing just what he did, consecrating ourselves to God, putting on Christ before men and angels, and by the self-same act symbolize all the essential principles of the gos-

pel, surely the act must be one which outranks in dignity any other outward act of which human beings are capable, and one on which an intelligent universe must gaze with admiration and delight. Impressed with these views of the dignity of baptism, the candid inquirer, shocked at the impiety of calling it a mere form, thus casting dishonor on the Almighty, may naturally incline to the other extreme. It need excite no surprise if one should say, "Surely the performance of such a deed will ensure the salvation of the soul; for it is not to be supposed that any of those can be lost who are admitted to such a privilege; and surely the neglect of such a solemn duty must lead to destruction; surely there can be no forgiveness for such flagrant sin."

The lover of evangelical truth needs not to be reminded that nothing that we can *do* is the groundwork of our salvation. "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; . . . by the works

of the law shall no flesh be justified." Gal. ii. 16. All deeds of the law, that is, all acts of obedience, are here classed together, and of course baptism is included; and if the whole of them together are declared to be worthless as a ground of justification, of course any one of them must be so.

But even if the baptism prescribed *were* meritorious, and possessed of saving efficacy, it does not follow that everything that is called by the name of baptism would be of equal value. Suppose the outward act to be done; but if it is *not* done as an act of obedience; and *not* because it is a form prescribed; and *not* as an act of worship; and *not* in imitation of our Lord's example; and *not* as an act of private and personal consecration; and *not* as an act of public profession; and *not* as an act of symbolic meaning; then indeed it is not only a form but a *mere* form; its spiritual character is gone; it is simply mechanical, and has no more value nor dignity than a

washing of the body which might happen to one by accident. If the *word* fails to profit when not mixed with faith in them that hear it, so neither does baptism profit when not mixed with faith in them that receive it. Indeed, "*whatsoever* is not of faith is sin." Rom. xiv. 23. And surely what is done in the name of the Holy Trinity, if without faith, must be sin in most aggravated form. The baptism which is required of us involves all the religious elements heretofore described; hence a baptism so-called which has *none* of those elements is clearly not the same thing; and even if there were saving power in genuine baptism, which there is not, there could be none in this. Doubtless many have been baptized with a spurious baptism, and have discovered at last that it was indeed a mere form. But it can never be too often repeated, that baptism however genuine and proper, and however exalted in rank as a duty, is after all only a duty; and we must not make the fear-

ful mistake of substituting corporeal washing in water for spiritual washing in the blood of the atonement.

The intelligent inquirer may still say, "I know that baptism is not our saviour; Christ is our Saviour; I know that the duty of baptism whether discharged with faith or without faith, is like all other duties, and is neither the reason of our being saved, nor the means of our being saved, nor a certain evidence that we are or will be saved; but is not the *neglect* of it a certain evidence that we are lost, and also a good reason why we should be lost?"

In reply to this let it be said, that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound; and that there is no sin so dreadful that the blood of Christ has not power to wash it out. True, there is such a thing spoken of as an unpardonable sin, but it is not implied that this is because there is any failure in the efficacy of the atonement; and above all, there

is not the least hint that this sin consists in the neglect of baptism. It is possible indeed that baptism, *like any other duty*, might occupy such a position in the life of an individual man, as to be *in his case* a turning-point, a test question, on the decision of which, it is to be settled whether or not he will yield unqualified obedience to God; and *in his case* neglect of this particular duty might be *an* unpardonable sin; but to say in general terms that the neglect of baptism is an unpardonable sin, is to say that which has no shadow of warrant in the New Testament. Neglect of baptism is like neglect of any other duty —sinful. But sin does not stand between God's elect and heaven: Christ has removed it; his blood has washed it into nothingness.

Again comes in the honest seeker for truth and says, "You tell me that the duty of baptism is one of vast importance, and yet that its observance will not save, nor its neglect destroy. How can these things be reconciled?

What is the exact relation of the duty to the salvation of the soul?"

The relation is the same as that of any other duty, neither less nor more. Its importance as a duty does not give it the least importance as a saviour. It holds high rank in one department, and no rank at all in the other. Duties may vary in their relative importance, but they do *not* vary in their universal want of power to save, or to do anything *toward* saving. In that respect duties are all alike.

It may throw some light on the whole subject to answer the often-asked question, "Is baptism essential?" The answer to this question will be nothing more than repetition, in different form, of what has been already said; but difference of form may be exactly what is needed.

The question as it stands is unintelligible. The word *essential* implies relationship; and relationship implies two objects of thought,

for if there were only one object, relationship would be impossible; and in the question asked only one object is presented—namely, baptism; it is therefore incomplete and cannot be answered. He to whom it is addressed may well ask, Essential to *what?* If the inquiry be as to whether baptism is essential to salvation, the answer has already been given, It is *not* essential. If the inquiry be, Is baptism essential to duty? the answer has also been given, It *is* essential.

Another inquiry suggests itself, and that is, How can a thing be essential to duty and yet not essential to salvation? This question implies forgetfulness of the whole scheme of redemption. Absolute obedience in every jot and tittle is essential to duty; but if absolute obedience be essential to salvation, then none will be saved, for there is none righteous, no not one. Our only hope is that our shortcomings in regard either to baptism, or to anything else, are atoned for by the precious blood

of him who died for us, and gave himself for us, and bare our sins in his own body on the tree.

It is aside from present purposes, but it may not be amiss to say to those who speak of non-essentials, that if the word *non-essential* is not connected in their minds with some other word, their language is meaningless, and they deceive themselves by supposing that they are saying something when they are saying nothing. Non-essential to what? *That* is the question. Without an expressed or implied answer to this, the word *non-essential* conveys no idea whatever. When they speak of this or that being non-essential, do they mean non-essential to salvation? If so, let them remember that it may still be essential to *duty*. And to speak lightly of duty is to speak lightly of law, and to speak lightly of law is to speak lightly of God. Let us therefore be careful in speaking of non-essentials, lest we fall into the folly of talking about noth-

ing, or into the sin of casting contempt on the holy law of God.

The exact relation of baptism to the salvation of our souls has now been set forth; we have seen that in *this* relation it differs from no other duty; and now, avoiding on the one hand the error of those in whose extreme view it is endowed with the miraculous power of regeneration; and on the other hand the error of those who look on it as a mere form; and avoiding too the strangely illogical error of those who speak of it as a trifle and yet hasten to administer it to the dying; and for ourselves regarding it simply as an important duty, but not as a saviour, nor possessed of any merit whatever, —let us examine the Scriptures, to ascertain the *degree* of importance as a duty, which is there attached to it.

1. Let us begin by saying that we are always greatly influenced by first impressions. There is a reason why this should be so.

The mind is in good condition then to form clear conceptions. To that which is first there can be nothing previous. Hence there are no disturbing influences, and nothing interferes with or modifies the full force of any thought that may be presented. When a public speaker rises to address an assembly, his very attitude and look, before he has said a word, will influence the minds of his hearers favorably or unfavorably. His first sentence is sure to be listened to, and on its effect, to no small extent, depends his success. The preacher begins by announcing his text. This always commands attention. The sermon is supposed to come from the text; hence the sermon must be *in* the text. Sermon and text are in a sense the equivalents of each other; as it were the opposite sides of an equation; the text is the sermon in brief; the sermon is the text expanded.

Now what is the text of the ministry of Jesus Christ taken as a whole? What is his

attitude when he is first presented to the world in his public character? What is the first impression that he makes?

For ever be it remembered that the very first recorded utterance of Jesus Christ, which by extension of meaning may be applied to us all, and which certainly applied to himself, was his testimony for baptism. Let the human race turn their eyes upon him as he introduces himself at once to his work and to the world, and they behold him in the act of baptism. This is at once his first utterance and his first attitude. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," are the first recorded public words that fell from the lips of the Son of God. Suiting the action to the word, he yields himself to the rite, and calling upon mankind to remotest generations, as it were with a shout that will resound to the end of time, he said "THUS"!

Here, then, is the text of the whole ministry of Jesus Christ, both spoken and acted. Here

is an epitome, in word and emblem together, of all that his future ministry is to develop. He knew the power of first impressions, and selected, as the first that he would make, that which is made by baptism. It may amaze us, but still it is true, that baptism has been selected by Infinite Wisdom as the initial of the grand and glorious work on earth of the Redeemer of mankind. Does all this seem to be too wonderful to be true? Look to the record and see if a public word was ever spoken by him prior to the word "*Thus;*" or if a public act was ever performed by him previous to baptism. Here, then, is both the title-page and the frontispiece of his ministry. There are the recorded words; there is the picture of the act. If Christ has honored baptism thus, by putting it in the foreground of his work, let those beware who speak of it as a thing of little moment.

2. First impressions are strong; perhaps last impressions are stronger. We may forget

our first introduction to a friend; we are not likely to forget our last and parting interview. Especially is this the case when we know, at the time of the interview, that it is to be the last. Dying words are apt to be undying words. We cherish them with peculiar interest and with utmost tenderness; and, even if they were *not* cherished, even if we try to obliterate them, they fasten themselves upon our memory and seem to sink through our whole nature. Jesus Christ knew what was in man, and he knew the power of last impressions, and among the last words he ever uttered were these: "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." This was after he had risen from the dead; it was after forty days of mysterious existence before he had ascended to his Father, between the lowly sepulchre and the heavenly throne, and in his last moment on earth, just before he was received into a cloud up into heaven out of sight.

Surely the occasion was a grand one, and the words then spoken ought to have been worthy of it, and they *were*. They were words that spoke of baptism. If baptism was the text and exordium of his ministry, so now it has become its peroration. He closed as he began. The initial adumbrated the conclusion. The orator prepares with care his closing words; the lawyer wishing success strives to get the last word; the dying friend, knowing his words to be the last, and with eternity right before him, speaks words of tenderness and truth; and Jesus Christ, closing his ministry, and closing his personal intercourse with his people, and knowing that they would never hear his words on earth again, spoke of baptism. Let the lip quiver when it utters the word *mere*.

Is it not wonderful that the mention of baptism is both at the beginning and at the end of the ministry of Jesus Christ? Ought not these two God-spoken announcements to arrest

the attention of mankind? Are they not like two sentinels, one at either end; like two great watch-towers over against each other; like two huge pillars parallel and opposite, based on earth, and reaching to heaven? Let those reject these figures who please, but the world is challenged to dispute the *facts*. Nor is it any relief to say that the facts were accidents. Accidents do not happen with God. Nor is there any relief in saying that the facts are unimportant. If the beginning and the ending of the public career of incarnate Godhead are not important, it would be in vain to search the annals of time or of eternity for that which *is* important.

3. But another view awaits us. When one person is giving directions to another in regard to a multitude of things, he mentions a few of the most prominent and important, particularly and by name; the rest he groups together, in phrases which describe them all *as a whole*, but no one of them as a unit. Especially is

this the case if the directions are the last that are to be given. In such a case, to mention and make conspicuous trifling matters of detail, to the forgetfulness or neglect of the main and leading points, would be unnatural, and, to a well-constituted mind, impossible.

Just before our Lord parted with his disciples for the last time, he held a conversation with them, in which he gave them his final directions for the great work that lay before them of evangelizing the world. All the words that he spoke, it is to be presumed, were not recorded; but we may judge of what was said by what is written. The record shows that, in speaking of various and multiform duties, he used generic terms, saying comprehensively, and without particular description of any one thing, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." But, from out the long catalogue of the "all things" which they are commanded to teach, one thing is mentioned

by name, and *only* one, and that one is baptism: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them." Why this particularity? Why was specific mention made of this? Why was this segregated and made to stand out in bold relief, while the "all things," grouped together, formed the background? Suppose the thoughts to be presented to the mind by the act of painting rather than by words. Which would be the conspicuous figure on the canvas? Which would be the key to the picture? What means this, that baptism stands alone, and flooded with light, while the "all things" cluster together in the shade? It may not be easy to answer this last question, but, whatever the answer may be, he must be audacious indeed who supposes baptism to be anything less than a *great* commandment.

4. Let it not be supposed that imagination has outstripped the reality. Our ideals never exceed, but always fall short of, God's reals. Another fact confronts us, more astounding

than any that have yet been named. There are many, many things which we are required to observe and do; but there is only one duty devolving on any member of the human race, which he is required to do "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," and that one duty is baptism. Why should the act be coupled with this dread and awful formula? What else can it be than to give it the emphasis of the Infinite? If baptism is an expression, are not the tremendous powers of Eternity summoned up to infuse the energy of Godhead into it? Why is no other duty required to be done in a manner so deliberate, so solemn, and so awe-striking? By withholding the dread sanction from other duties and giving it to this, are they not relatively depressed, and is not this made to loom up as, in some respect at least, a duty without a peer? True, when the sick are anointed with oil, and the issues of life and death are at stake, it is to be done "in the name of the Lord," but

not "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." There is no calling up of the three separate Persons of the Trinity; God is appealed to as God; but the three glorious Witnesses, each by name, and one by one, in mysterious unity, are not displayed as in baptism. Actions are dignified by deliberation; actions are dignified by being done in the immediate presence of God, and in the name of God. That the idea of God may fully occupy the mind, and that the thought may be detained, that his glory may spread over all, and his majesty make all sublime, he unfolds himself as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the ordinance of baptism. Why is it that one duty, and only one, is accompanied by these august honors and these terrible sanctions? Whatever the reason may be, the fact is undisputed and immovable. In the light of this fact, let scoffers turn white as snow!

Modern scholarship seems to have most

clearly decided that the word translated *in*, in the formula of baptism, should have been translated *into*. What the words may mean, when thus translated, we cannot precisely conceive. But there is something awful about them. Baptized *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost! There seems to be a hidden significance in the word *into*, before which the meaning of the word *in* melts away to nothing. Is it too much to say that the name of God *is* God? And are we baptized into him? Are we plunged into that ocean of Eternal Being? Whether it be so or not, we are drowned in this ocean of thought. Overwhelming as these conceptions may be, and inadequate as must be our view of the truth of God, yet the *fact* stands out on record, on the living oracles of the living God, that we are baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Possibly, angels may comprehend what to us

is an insolvable mystery; and, if they do, must they not look on with amazement as upon one of the most wonderful phenomena of Eternity when they behold a sinful man baptized into the name of God? Without pretending to explain what surpasses human powers of thought, it is enough to say that baptism would not be the only duty commanded to be done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," if it were not a duty whose importance and whose rank should command the awe-struck reverence of all created intelligences.

5. But we have not reached the greatest wonder yet. Our nature is not poured out into words as it can be into acts; and neither our words nor acts are like those of the Almighty. In the formula of baptism we use his sacred name. True, it is by his command that we do it; still, it is *we* who do it. On one stupendous occasion the formula was

not spoken, but acted, and it was God who enacted it. Once only, in the history of the world, has God in his triune character manifested himself to his creatures, and that was on the occasion of baptism. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were each separately manifested at the river Jordan. The glorious Son was baptized; the glorious Father spoke from heaven; and the glorious Holy Spirit descended like a dove! The words of the formula were embodied into the acts of the Trinity! For ever sacred, for ever awful, for ever fearful words! Oh, sublimest drama of Earth! Never before, never since, has the world witnessed such a spectacle. Once the world was visited by more than twelve legions of angels, but these were only the messengers of the Throne, and not its Occupant. Gethsemane was a place of lonely agony. Calvary resounds with the cry, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" But in baptism the triune God has set his Earthly Throne, for there only has he

been manifested to the world. Perhaps the facts of that occasion are the basis of our present formula; these words are the echoes of those facts; and they may have been prescribed to keep us ever in remembrance of that moment of transcendent majesty, the most conspicuous and exalted moment of all Time. But why was baptism singled out as the occasion for such amazing display? We may not be able to say, but the fact stands up as a witness with a voice louder than ten thousand thunders as God's testimony in honor of baptism.

6. It will relieve the strain upon our minds to take a view less overpowering. We judge of a man by the company he keeps. The same principle that prevails among animals of lower order seems to hold good among men, — like consorts with like. Hence to know a man's associates is in a certain sense to know him. Knowing the class to which he belongs, we know at least his rank and

his general characteristics, even if we remain ignorant of his individual peculiarities. So also we judge of the opinion which a man has of anything by the classification which he awards it; or by the connection in which he speaks of it, and especially if he *always* speaks of it in that connection. Thus if one speaks of angels and archangels, cherubs and seraphs, we take it for granted that in his opinion these different orders of beings are in some way related to each other, and that in some respects they are, if not equals, yet worthy of being named together. There may be differences among them; still, he looks at the resemblances rather than at the differences, and places them all in the same category. So, too, when in the Apocalypse mention is made of dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and liars, we suppose that however these may differ from each other, they are all measurably on the same footing, because the

classification groups them all together as members of the same family. What minor differences there may be among them are ignored because of their general similarity; and we are confirmed in this view because elsewhere the same classes with others of like character are named together, and the same destiny is assigned them. In fact, every man's mind is so constituted that he cannot help being influenced in his opinion of a thing by the classification in which it is found. The principle is founded in nature, and as the Bible was inspired by the God of nature, it cannot be wrong to apply the principle to the interpretation of the book. What classification is awarded by the word of God to baptism? Let the record speak for itself: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

Five things are here spoken of; believing, —not believing, — salvation, — damnation, —

and baptism. The first subject named—believing — is one of infinite importance, for "Without faith it is impossible to please God." The second — not believing — is the peer of the first, for the unbeliever makes God a liar, and unbelief is the seed-sin of all sins. The third — salvation — is a thing of transcendent importance, for it involves all the eternal joys that are at the right hand of God. The fourth—damnation—is fit to be mentioned in frightful antithesis to what precedes, for it involves infinite ruin in everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. These four themes, towering in gigantic importance, are fitly named together, and the fifth — baptism — is fit to be named in this colossal companionship or it would not have been so named. It is not a case of accident, where a small thing has by inadvertence been slipped in among the great. It is by divine intention that these five things are classified together. It is the grouping of

Infinite Wisdom. Nor is it conceivable that either God or men would put a trifle in connection with the most stupendous themes of eternity.

Judge of baptism by the company it keeps in the word of God, and decide whether it is a thing of small moment. There must be something in the nature of the facts which makes their association proper. God would not associate things together in a kind of union which ought not so to be associated. Hence from the very fact that they are named together, we know not only that there is a propriety in the combination, but we also know that there must be something in the nature and essence of things which is the foundation of this propriety. What this something may be, which brings close together things which in our conceptions are far apart, we do not know, and have no means of ascertaining. But our conceptions are not to be our guide. God's conceptions

are eternal truth. And if in his conceptions belief and unbelief, and salvation and damnation, and baptism, are so connected as to be named conjointly, then what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

It adds force to the argument to remember what has been already said, though on a different topic, that baptism is also named in connection with "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The association is one of supremest dignity, nor is it less than sacrilege to suppose for a moment that such association would find place in the word of God, if it had not foundation in the everlasting law of right. He who scoffs at baptism, scoffs at that which keeps glorious company. If an insult is offered to one's associates, is it not offered to him?

7. The words small and great are relative in their meaning; and things small and great are so only by comparison. The bap-

tism of a believer is in some respects a small thing; it is a small thing when compared with the baptism of Jesus Christ. "Thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness." If there be any doubt as to whether the word *us* includes ourselves, there can be no doubt that it included him who uttered it. If he had said, "thus it becometh *me* to fulfil all righteousness," the words would have expressed real truth. From this we learn that if our Lord had not done what he did, his righteousness would not have been fulfilled; and if not fulfilled, it would have been incomplete; and if his righteousness had been incomplete, he would have been incomplete, and the world would have had no Saviour! Hence *his* baptism *was* essential, — essential to the salvation of the world! What a moment was that in the history of the universe, when on its action hung the destinies of eternity! No wonder it was honored by sublimest manifestations,

and elicited expressions of divine pleasure, and displays of glory from the Throne itself. True, indeed, *every* moment of Christ's life was pregnant with eternal destiny, but this particular moment has been singled out for pre-eminent distinction, above every other moment in the earthly career of the Son of God. Perhaps it was because in that act of consecration, he took upon him the vow to do and to suffer his Father's will to the uttermost, and all his future work was constructively and concentratively present in that one germinal deed. In our own baptism, although our salvation does not depend on it, let us remember that it is the imitation and the counterpart of that on which the salvation of the world *did* depend. Let this fact invest it with profoundest solemnity and dignify it into awful majesty. And if not in the letter, yet in spirit, Christ includes ourselves with him in the word *us*, elevating us thus to the heavenly peerage of the sons

of God, let us so observe the duty as to be worthy of the glorious companionship, and let our baptismal vows be like his whose promise was equivalent to performance.

8. Another fact worthy of our most devout attention, is the fact that baptism is the only duty of all the duties enjoined upon us, which we are required to perform but once. This fact gives it a distinction which it enjoys all alone. The observance of the Lord's Supper may be, and ought to be, often repeated. Many other duties continuous in their nature seem to be part and parcel of our daily lives, and in their discharge we may from time to time improve. But on baptism there can be no improvement. It is the act of a moment, and when done it is done for eternity. If we are to be judged for the deeds done in the body, and if this one deed invested with the most awful and most glorious, and most dreadful sanctions of the Almighty, is to be done but once, and once

for all, with what solemn preparation, and with what unutterable reverence should it be done! Is it not the greatest visible crisis in life? Is it not a turning-point to which we should look both forward and backward with trembling interest? May it not be the era from which some of the grandest interests of eternity are dated?

9. There is a difference between truths and facts. It is not easy to give a definition of truth, but the word fact may be more easily handled, and it is with this chiefly that we have to do. It is from the Latin word *facio*, *factum*, and means that which is *done*. Truth is not the result of action, but fact is. Truth may be spoken, truth may be believed, but it cannot be *done*. No agent is necessary to its existence. Not so with fact; for, before anything can be *done*, there must be a *doer*. Truth is eternal; facts date only from the time when they became facts; that is, from the time when they were *done*. Truth is much more vast

than fact, and oftentimes not so easily comprehended. Truth is matter of principle, which may not be clearly understood. Fact is like that which is the object of sense. Truth may often seem to evade the grasp of the wisest. Fact is within the reach of all, even the feeblest. These differences, and others that might be named, are such that the presentation of truth often fails to make as clear and as strong an impression on the mind as the presentation of fact.

Now, in what has been said of baptism, there may have been a mixture of truth and fact; but every point that has been presented as a topic is distinctly matter of fact. If, in connection with these facts, truths have been uttered, so also there may have been intermixture of error; and some of the inferences drawn from the facts may not have been drawn correctly. But in the facts themselves there can be no error; nor, I presume, will the statement of them be disputed. Let us re-

capitulate them. 1. It is a *fact*, that baptism was the initial of the ministry of Jesus Christ. 2. It is a *fact*, that he closed his ministry as he began it,—with baptism. 3. It is a *fact*, that the record of his last conversation on earth shows specific mention of this duty and of no other. 4. It is a *fact*, that this is the only duty which we are required to perform in the name of the Trinity. 5. It is a *fact*, that once only was Godhead displayed to earth in triune character, and that this was done on the occasion of baptism. 6. It is a *fact*, that baptism is classed in the Scriptures with things of most tremendous import and of infinite dignity. 7. It is a *fact*, that the baptism of Christ was essential to the fulfilment of all righteousness. 8. It is a *fact*, that baptism is the only duty of which one single moment in the life of an immortal being has a monopoly.

Whatever may be thought of the inferences that have been drawn, the *facts* are immovable. Statement of truth might be disputed,

for there might be difference of opinion as to what *is* truth; but there can be no difference of opinion as to the *facts*. The facts are their own witnesses; they speak for themselves.

In forming theories on baptism, if one disregards these facts, he is not even building a house on the sand; he is trying to build in the air. On the other hand, a theory which is built on the facts,—on these solid rocks,—is worthy of this respect at least, that it is built on a good foundation.

Why not apply the principles of the Baconian Philosophy to the interpretation of Scripture, and take the facts as starting-points? With these facts spread out before the eyes of mankind, it is surprising that any should think of baptism as a thing of small importance, and so signally undervalue that which God has so signally honored. It is equally astonishing that any should incline to overrate that which it would almost seem cannot be overrated. Not satisfied with the exaltec

rank which the facts of Scripture accord to baptism, they must even go farther, and (incredible to relate) claim for it something *more;* they claim for it the power of regenerating the soul, which belongs only to the Holy Spirit; or, if not so wildly extreme as this, they claim that it is the *means* by which the Holy Ghost renews the soul, thus substituting the mere water used in baptism for the truth of the word, and for the blood of the covenant.

Let us avoid both extremes; and let us remember that the fact that baptism holds high rank as duty, gives it no rank whatever, and no *place,* as the groundwork or means of our salvation. Christ is our righteousness. His blood cleanses from all sin. Neglect of baptism must be sin; and failure to hold it in proper esteem must be sin; but the precious blood of the Lamb of God has power to wash away *all* sin. No sin is so great as to defy the power of the blood of the everlasting covenant. Christ is all; Christ is enough.

If any man be in Christ, whether baptized or not, he is a new creature. If any man be not in Christ, whether baptized or not, his doom is perdition.

Let us thank God that, while our salvation is made secure by the merits and mediation of his Son, we are permitted to obey his commandments, in keeping of which there is great reward.

THE END.

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